I Am the Bad Guy

Here's the thing: I am the bad guy. I don't know how else to tell you this. I'm also not entirely sure if there's a better way to warn you about this: this is a high school story. Normally, high school stories are full of serious optimism and something edging close to nostalgia, but this one is really more about me being a jerk.

So here are some quick facts: I, as a disenchanted, ironic high-schooler, despised the very notion of Homecoming. Squeezing us into a gym to dance to slow Journey songs while a group of morose teachers watched us from the sidelines seemed condescending and demeaning to my dignity as a developed, responsible person. Putting on a suit was also very confusing.

More quick facts: I had an enormous crush on a girl who I will now name Chelsea, and several months earlier Chelsea had broken up with her boyfriend, who I will now name Boyfriend. After a few weeks, I mustered up the courage and asked the now-available Chelsea to Homecoming. She said yes, I didn't barf all over myself, and as cliché as it sounds, the rest of the month flew by and before I knew it, it was the night of Homecoming. She looked great, I managed to put on a suit, and everything was going swell.

Disaster bloomed about 15 minutes after we got into the gym. Just as we were starting to dance, Chelsea spotted Boyfriend dancing with Girl Who Was Not Her, and immediately proceeded to start bawling. Now by 'bawling,' I don't mean watery eyes or even a steady flow of tears, but fully fledged wailing. As in red-faced, all-out howling that rose above the pounding
music and caused nearby couples to stop and stare. Tears were not so much flowing as gushing, and her makeup had begun to run. To my horror, though, was the fact that she was still dancing. As in still waving her arms, moving her feet, going through the full motions as she continuously sobbed and wept wretchedly.

Here’s the part where I’m the bad guy of the story: Having been completely blindsided by her breakdown and the sheer contrast between the movements of her body and the howling anguish of her face, I very calmly, very slowly, began to back away from my date. This didn’t seem to interrupt her overwhelming despair, and so I sped my pace up, and backed out of the gym. From afar, she looked like a graceful, if now purple-faced, tribesperson performing a ritual dance, complete with a very intense, very heartfelt incantation. I kept this in mind as I spent the rest of the night bumping into friends around the cafeteria, cheerfully discussing anything other than my date who, to my knowledge, was still bawling and dancing alone in the middle of the gym.

I don’t think I need to tell you that this looks really bad. I had admired this girl for so long, had invested a part of myself in her and, in a way, convinced her to invest even the slightest part of her into me, and then promptly abandoned her when things got messy. All the feelings I thought I had for her had somehow evaporated, instantly, in a maelstrom of confusion and pop music-infused horror, which led me to believe that I probably didn’t feel anything deeply for her at all. If that sounds mushy and sentimental, that’s probably—so sorry—because it is.

A few days later, Chelsea called me. Since the night Homecoming ended, when I saw her at the small after-party corralled by a group of (rightfully) concerned friends and had tactfully avoided going over to apologize and/or ask if there was anything I could do, I had expected to be confronted about what had happened, either in person or even in a “Hey, Just Wondering Why
You Abandoned Me in a Time of Great Personal Distress" courtesy text. So when she called, I fully expected to be yelled at, and almost wanted to be.

But the true, awful thing is that she called to apologize. She had called to apologize to me. She said she was sorry for making such a scene, and that it must've been so awkward for me to see that, and that it wasn't fair to me for her to get upset like that. And, finally, here's the worst part. Here's the part where I had one last chance to apologize, but instead just backed out again: in true bad guy fashion, I told her it was fine, that it was no problem for me, and that she, of all people, didn't have to worry about being fair.